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AUTHOR Aitken, Joan E.
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ABSTRACT

As part of a state-mandated assessment process, faculty and students need innovative approaches which can empower them to learn, grow, and change in the classroom. The University of Missouri-Kansas City Department of Communication Studies uses three types of student portfolios: (1) a university-wide portfolio of the student's work in all courses for a given semester; (2) a course portfolio that reflects what goes on behind individual tests and assignments; and (3) a student selected portfolio of work evaluated by a professional in a student's prospective area of employment. More than assessment tests and statistics, these portfolio assessments give students and faculty crucial control and insights regarding the learning process. (Three figures presenting the form used by the department for student portfolios, the form used for faculty feedback, and the protocol for student portfolio and interview assessment are included; 18 references, and a survey instrument and teacher comments from the English department about course portfolios are attached.) (Author/RS)

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UMKC

University of Missouri - Kansas City

COMMUNICATION STUDIES

College of Arts and Sciences
203A Royall Hall

Kansas City, MO 64110-2499
Tel: (816) 235-1698 (work)
(816) 765-3148 (home)

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Empowering Students and Faculty through Portfolio Assessment

Joan E. Aitken

University of Missouri-Kansas City

A paper presented at the Annual Convention of the Southern States Communication Association and the Central States Communication Association, April 18, 1993, Lexington, Kentucky.

Author Identification: Joan E. Aitken (Ed.D., University of Arkansas) is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Communication Studies, University of Missouri-Kansas City, 54011-2499. She wishes to thank Michael Neer for his assistance in the preparation of this paper.

Abstract: As part of a state-mandated assessment process, faculty and students need innovative approaches which can empower them to learn, grow, and change in the classroom. The University of Missouri-Kansas City Department of Communication Studies uses three types of student portfolios: (a) a university-wide portfolio of a student's work in all courses for a given semester, (b) a course portfolio that reflects what goes on behind individual tests and assignments, and (c) a student selected portfolio of work evaluated by a professional in a student's prospective area of employment. More than assessment tests and statistics, these portfolio assessments give students and faculty crucial control and insights regarding the learning process.

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Empowering Students and Faculty through Portfolio Assessment

Six years ago our state legislature mandated higher education assessment at the department level. Over those years we have struggled with test development (Neer, 1989; Aitken & Neer 1993), graduate interviews, faculty and course evaluation, and more as we conducted a varied approach to program assessment (Aitken & Neer, 1991a, 1991b, 1992a). Despite the extensive time and energy spent on cognitive testing, the politics in our state situation have negated much of our work. We now risk the effects of campus competing against campus, department against department. Two anecdotes illustrate my point.

One problem came when our state decided to tie funding to assessment. The communication department of another state university was tauted over our department because of their use of a nationally normed test, the Graduate Record Examination (GRE), versus our departmentally developed test we published ourselves. The state considered the Graduate Record Examination a better assessment of the success of a communication program than a test designed to test communication competencies. The content and scores of the tests meant nothing at the state level.

My second anecdote is about an annual assessment report, in which we made the mistake of saying our faculty was "disappointed" with the students' mean score of 70% on our volunteer test. That was quoted into a state report which

compared us negatively against another department which was "pleased" with student performance on a departmental test. The catch is the report failed to say that the mean scores of both department tests was 70%. Different faculty response resulted in a negative reaction to our department that we are still seeing reported years later.

So, the choices we make about assessment can make us vulnerable. What can faculty do to empower themselves in the assessment process? The path to using assessment for empowerment is twofold: (a) find out what you need to know so that you can improve your program, and (b) play the game so that you create the most favorable impression for your program. In other words, find out everything you can to improve yourselves while releasing your information judiciously.

Although the need to use assessment as a departmental public relations tool has been discussed elsewhere (Aitken & Neer, 1992b), the importance of politics in assessment cannot be overemphasized. Faculty believe in the concept of assessment--we always have assessed our students and our programs--but the way state-mandated programs are implemented, monitored, and used against institutions necessitates caution. In a climate of diminishing resources, faculty and administrators involved in assessment need to be politically astute. First, legislators need to be convinced of the effectiveness of their funding to higher education. Anyone who thinks legislators keep costs of prisons, for

example, separate in their minds from costs of universities, has not talked to our legislators. Legislators want proof that dollars are spent well and that they should continue to spend instead of cut. In addition, "assessment" and "accountability" are hot political campaign buzz words that help candidates become elected officials. As Rossmann and El-Khawas (1987) explained: "Many state political leaders found perceived weaknesses in elementary and secondary education to be an effective political issue, and are now repeating that political scenario with a focus on higher education." In our situation, we have lost our naivete and now realize the complex demands of assessment. As Mehrens (1992) warned, "Any assessment to be used for accountability purposes has to be administratively feasible, professionally credible, publicly acceptable, legally defensible, and economically affordable" (p. 3). These are difficult issues for people who perceive their roles to be teaching, research, and service. Those of us in assessment must learn the politics of assessment so that our programs can continue to exist.

The Portfolio Solution

How can one gain important information about students and programs which can be positively reported? The answer is student portfolios, and use of portfolios is on the increase. According to a study by Ory (1991), approximately one-third of the nation's colleges and university are collecting student portfolios (p. 451).

The subjective nature of portfolios immediately changes internal and external perceptions of program assessment. Faculty can still report numbers, but they include the number of students assessed, the percentage of faculty involved in assessment, and other statistics that compare favorably. Meanwhile, faculty can use student portfolios to gain insight into program success. Many people think portfolios are a good idea, but because of their subjective nature, feel uncertain how to use them. As Forrest (1991) analyzed it: "There is widespread intuitive belief among those interested in assessing general education that using portfolios might lead to better information about those programs. However, most colleges and universities have little knowledge about or experience in using such an approach" (p. 1). Thus, the purpose of this article is to discuss the use of student portfolios in the assessment of communication programs. The nature of portfolio assessment, ways portfolios relate specifically to communication studies, advantages and disadvantages in using the portfolio method, and methods of portfolio evaluation are considered here. To illustrate these points, I have brought some example portfolios. These include portfolios for a specific class in rhetorical criticism, one student's curriculum wide portfolio for one semester, and some program portfolios prepared by students for our department. Please examine these portfolios during and after my talk.

<u>What is portfolio assessment?</u>

A portfolio is a collection (file folder, binder, or box) of data about a student's progress over time. Such a file commonly contains examples of written work, but also may include such items as autobiographical data, class assignments, student self-evaluations of progress toward departmental goals, materials generated while at high school or from early transfer, published work, work examples, advisor notes on the student's progress as obtained from interviews, a videotaped speech, an audiotaped interview, a resume, and test results.

The beauty of the portfolio is that the primary purpose of the portfolio can be individual student learning. But, when used as part of the assessment process, portfolios go beyond evaluation of the student to provide information for the evaluation of their instructors, courses, and program. That evaluation may be conducted by faculty, students, administrators, or external reviewers (community connections, consultants, accrediting associations). Because of the difficulty in using the entire faculty to analyze portfolios, using a small faculty review committee or simply the department assessment director to make recommendations to other faculty is the most common approach (Forrest, 1990). Faculty may want to collect a range of materials from weak students, typical students, and outstanding students, so that they can paint a broad picture of what is going on within the department. Faculty may want to decide the contents of the portfolio or give students their choice of "good" work to

represent themselves. Because faculty cannot collect nor have room to keep everything, you will need to set priorities about the nature of the content.

How Do Portfolios Relate to Communication Studies?

The student portfolio lends itself well to the field of communication (Dick & Robinson, 1991; Winter & Winter, 1992). Students in mass media and journalism, for example, traditionally have been encouraged to prepare a portfolio. In our department, we have formalized the portfolio process for communication studies majors by collecting three types of portfolios: (a) university-wide portfolios of a student work in all courses for a given semester, (b) course portfolios that reflect what goes on behind individual tests and assignments, and (c) student selected portfolios of program work. Although the first two approaches are used on a limited basis, they give unique insights. Most faculty know little about how students spend their time or what work they do for other classes. The first method --curriculum-wide portfolios--helps faculty know what students actually do in college. They give insights into work load and the nature of assignments in various courses. The second method--course portfolio--is designed to improve instruction within an individual course. In addition, other department faculty can see what is actually taught in a particular course. Of particular interest is to compare the portfolios of weak versus strong students. Both extremes can be surprising. The third type--a student selected portfolio of program work-

-is required of all majors in our department. Here are the steps for the department's required portfolio.

First, students prepare the portfolio in our cornerstone course. As part of course requirements, students prepare the portfolio in a file folder and complete a departmental form (see Figure 1). Faculty give feedback to students (see Figure 2) and put the portfolio in the student's departmental file. There is a place on the major declaration form and graduation checklist requiring verification of the student portfolio.

Second, students revise the portfolio while enrolled in a required organizational communication course, then have the portfolio reviewed by a professional in the field. The professional may give oral feedback, write a summary memo, or complete a form (see Figure 2). To update the portfolio, the student includes: an employment resume, a separate page of references, a completed job application form, and any other self-selected information. The student selects and schedules an interview for an informational interview with this person at his or her corporate office, then takes the portfolio to show to the interviewer. As followup, the student writes a one page formal business memo to the instructor explaining with whom the student interviewed, what the student learned from the experience regarding the interviewer's feedback. The student includes a copy of his or her formal follow-up business letter thanking the individual for the interview.

Finally, students are required to update their portfolios for graduation. The portfolios are kept for a brief time--according to space limitations--and are available for faculty use.

What Are the Advantages of Using Portfolios?

Various researchers have encouraged portfolio use as a learning and assessment tool (e.g. Brand, 1992; Gruber, 1992; Jacobi, Astin, Ayala, 1987; Mathies & Uphoff, 1992; McLean, 1990). Portfolios empower students. The major advantage of student portfolios is their educational function for students. A student portfolio: (a) emphasizes the student's learning process, (b) requires self-evaluation that leads to self-knowledge, (c) increases self-esteem as a student compiles information about her or his growth and accomplishments, and (d) improves skills when a student recognizes her or his competencies that need improvement. The portfolio is more a part of student learning than program evaluation and can help students evaluate their competencies while preparing for the job search process. Portfolios empower students by helping them make sense of their education as they prepare for the future. Hutchings (1990) gave specific advantages to portfolios: (a) "Unlike many methods, portfolios tell you not only where the student ends up but how she got there...they reveal learning over time" (p. 7), and; (b) they invite conversation and debate for sensemaking. Portfolios may be useful with exit interviews, for example (p. 7).

A major problem with standardized tests is determining effectiveness in measuring communication competencies. Portfolios give a way of measuring higher levels of cognitive processing and communication production skills that are difficult to measure in standardized tests. For example, one student might include a paper from a rhetorical criticism class which shows her ability to apply a critical method in detail, while another might include a videotape of a television commercial produced for class.

Portfolios empower faculty. Portfolios allow faculty to examine exactly what they are teaching. They invite use. Portfolios can generate new ideas about assignments, teaching, and testing of other faculty which faculty may chose to incorporate in their own classrooms. By including tests from courses in portfolios, the faculty can see the results of well-motivated students in various classes. Plus we gain insight into how faculty are using testing in course assessment. Portfolios open up dialog about teaching strategies by showing concrete examples. Portfolios are automatically localized and program-specific. The department has control of the assessment, with no externally imposed control.

Portfolios also have administrative advantages for faculty. First, they are inexpensive. There are the costs of copying portfolios and student honorariums for more extensive portfolios. For example, we paid a student $25 to provide the extensive box of curriculum-wide semester

coursework material I brought. In fact, when you consider costs, Forrest (1990) said: "Portfolios may represent the most cost-effective evaluation tool available" (p. 19). Second, portfolios are relatively simple and easy to use. Other than a possible need to obtain student releases and finding a method of portfolio evaluation the work rests on the student rather than faculty. When the work is incorporated as part of coursework and student career planning, the students are motivated to contribute. Although we consistently have had problems with student motivation in standardized testing, students see a purpose to the portfolios. Finally, portfolios are unobtrusive. Our paper and pencil tests included a series of five tests that take up to two hours each. The obvious time commitment of these tests took away from time that could be spent in instruction. A portfolio, however, can include tests and other methods of evaluation already developed by faculty. Students only need to spend the time to gather the materials to turn in to the department.

Portfolios coordinate the assessment effort. They tie together students, faculty, and community. When student must interview the professional and receive specific feedback on their portfolio, they often begin the assignment with reticence, but end up considering it one of their most valuable experiences. Every semester, someone receives employment as an outcome of the "informational interview." Plus, the portfolios help employers in our community to

understand what students and faculty are doing. Our School of Business and Public Administration, for example, uses a program portfolio tied to mentors from the business community. Our faculty find portfolios to be a useful reference when writing letters of recommendation for awards and employment. Such program portfolios reinforce the idea that a department is caring and committed toward students when faculty use the portfolios for employment, contacts after graduation, and letter of reference information.

What are the disadvantages of portfolios?

At the end of this paper is a survey from our English department about course portfolios (currently used in 12 courses). The faculty comment on advantages and disadvantages of portfolio assessment. One professor summed up the key disadvantage: "Paperload!" Portfolios generate much to read, evaluate, and store. The arguments about assessment technique are similar to those about quantitative versus qualitative research. Both are informative. Quantitative research can be dangerous in the assessment process, however, while portfolios are safe.

Hutchings (1990) summed up the disadvantages of using portfolios:

> They're bulky, time-consuming, difficult to make neat sense of, maybe not what the legislature had in mind, and they are in an early unproven stage of development....But what's most at stake here are educational values. Choosing portfolios is choosing to

enact--and communicate to students--a view of learning as involving, personal, connected, and ongoing (p. 8).

How should portfolios be evaluated?

Although the process of preparing and reviewing portfolios is useful, faculty may need a structured method for evaluating student portfolios. Forrest (1990) provided useful insights into how to evaluate portfolios:

> Reliability in the context of portfolio-assisted assessment means (1) the extent to which the evaluators agree on an analysis of a group of portfolios; (2) the extent to which these same evaluators would render the same judgments at another time; and (3) the extent to which these evaluators might agree with another group of evaluators. All three of these reliability studies should be conducted periodically to establish the degree of reliability of the portfolio-analysis process. Conducting such studies is a way, in and of itself, to help evaluators develop high reliability. Beyond such studies, one of the best ways to ensure reliable portfolio analysis is to develop written scoring protocol...for examining student products in relation to the goals of the ...program (p. 12)

We are in the process of developing checklists for internal and external evaluation. It seems particularly useful to have learning goals--pre-established program competencies in our case--against which one can compare the portfolios. External evaluators--persons from other

campuses, the community, and program review boards--can be used to help in evaluation. Peer evaluations of portfolios also are useful. By working together, a small group of students learn from examining other student portfolios.

After graduation assessment may be extremely useful for portfolio evaluation. We have conducted telephone surveys, but the process of tracking down our graduates is a difficult one, which becomes more difficult the more time elapsed since graduation. Our contact rate is less than a 20% contact rate. A system through which students could send portfolio information for some years after graduation would be useful. "Such evidence might include descriptions of employment, job supervisor ratings, or reports of continuing education" (Forrest, 1990, p. 9).

Conclusion

Student portfolios--curriculum-wide, program specific, and course specific--are an excellent way to empower students and faculty. The potential for student learning and program improvement outweigh the disadvantages of their cumbersome nature. For those faculty encountering the political reality of externally imposed assessment, portfolios give the information needed for program improvement without the costs and dangers of inappropriate statistical reportage inherent in quantitative assessment measures. As Hutchings (1990) explained, the use of portfolio assessment is on the rise because "clearly, people are finding something they need in portfolios" (p. 6)

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Figure 1

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College of Arts and Sciences
203 Royall Hall

University of Missouri - Kansas City

Kansas City, MO 64110-2499
Tel: (816) 235-1337

Student Portfolio

Students: As part of the Missouri state-mandated assessment process, we use student portfolios. You need not write anything new for the portfolio, but should make copies of good work from UMKC classes or other sources which you can place in a folder. Please check off items you include and make sure each item contains your name and date. You are responsible for contributing to your portfolio (in COMS 206, COMS 344, and at graduation). We recommend that you keep an original portfolio for yourself for employment interviews and only place copies of your work in the department portfolio.

Because the State of Missouri is requiring results from nationally-normed tests in our assessment, please send your score from the GRE, MAT, LSAT, or GMAT to the department.

Student name:_____

"I give my permission for Communication Studies faculty to use my portfolio in program assessment, for writing letters of reference, and related purposes."

Student signature:_____
Date:_____

Current address:_____

Telephone number: (work)_____ (home)_____

Permanent address:_____

---see back---

Contact person name, address, & phone (someone who will know your location several years from now):

_____

_____

Required:

__One standardized examination score required (such as GRE, LSAT, GMAT, or MAT)
__Three examples of your written work

Strongly recommended:

__An updated resume
__Your professional goals for graduation and 5 years later
__A summary of nonacademic accomplishments, including (COMS 206 assignment) community service, extracurricular activities, internship, nonprofit agency employment (COMS 344 assignment)
__A self-assessment of your 12 communication competencies (COMS 206 assignment)

Additional suggestions:

__Examples from a sophomore, junior, and senior level course
__Written work from your employment or internship
__Your research paper from the capstone course (COMS 483)
__An example of written work other than term papers (e.g. speech manuscript, newspaper article, advertisement, television script)
__A well-written essay test
__An essay on your personal theory of communication
__An explanation of coursework completed outside the department and its benefit
__A discussion of a valuable theory of communication
__Test from a course
__A recent transcript
__Letter(s) of reference
__Structured class activities
__A videoed performance or production
__A list of classical and contemporary fiction and nonfiction read in the last two years
__Photography examples
__List of the five books most valuable in communication studies (and why)
__List of periodicals and magazines regularly read (and why)

Figure 2

Faculty Feedback on Portfolio

The Portfolio Interview with Professional in the Field (15 points).
___15-14 (A) outstanding, ___13-12 (B) superior, ___11-10 (C) average for course,
___unacceptable, please see me about how to redo this assignment

__**everything about this assignment looks professional**

__portfolio to be returned to student (professional looking binder)
__copy for Communication Studies dept. in file folder (or note explaining that you are not a communication major)
__quality copying, layout, error free
__one-page resume
__references with your name and address as header
__completed job application form
__at least three examples of quality best work.
__signed, one page, typed, formal memo summarizing professional's evaluation (if you don't know how to write a formal memo, go to the library to learn)
__copy of mailed follow-up formal business letter thanking the individual for the interview
__well-written, well-presented materials

Comments:

Figure 3

Protocol for Student Portfolio and Interview Assessment

Student name:_____
Date:_____
Interviewer name and position:

Please rate items using the following scale:
1=excellent quality or skills
2=college-level quality or skills
3=insufficient quality or skills
n/a=not applicable for this portfolio

___Visual quality of presentation
___Writing skills
___Resume quality
___Critical thinking skills
___Interpersonal communication
___Language skills
___Leadership skills
___Reading skills
___Research skills
___Oral communication
___Cultural appreciation
___Decision-making skills
___Knowledge of the field
___Ethics

Comments:

College of Arts and Sciences
Department of English

University of Missouri-Kansas City
Cockefair Hall
5100 Rockhill Road
Kansas City, Missouri 64110-2499

816 235-1305
Fax 816 235-1717

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To: Joan Aitken, Dept. of Communications
From: Pat Huyett, Coordinator of Writing Assessment

The following survey was conducted at the University of Missouri-Kansas City among those who teach composition in the Department of English. We at first surveyed our staff to see who was using portfolios in their classrooms. We discovered that about half the staff was.

We wanted to encourage the rest of the staff to try using portfolios, so we thought the best way was to ask those who did use them how they do it. There are many variations on the theme, but generally, a portfolio is a set of writings a student works on throughout the semester. The instructor gives a final assessment at the end of the semester when the student turns in the polished work.

Portfolio grading or assessment is favored by experts in the field of writing assessment for a number of reasons. I won't go into those reasons here because I think our staff does a pretty good job of saying why they find portfolios useful. However I do recommend Portfolios: Process and Product edited by Pat Belanoff and Marcia Dickson for anyone who'd like to find out more.

This survey is concerned with portfolios in the classroom. But portfolios can be used in other ways. At some universities, English majors are required to build a portfolio during their college career and submit it to their department before graduation. There are also programs where portfolios built in a course are then assessed by other faculty members in lieu of a final exam or gatekeeper exam. While we've discussed the possibility of using large scale portfolio assessment here at UMKC, the time and the extra work involved makes it unfeasible for us at the present.

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Portfolio Survey

Portfolio assessment or grading is used at a number of colleges and universities in a variety of ways. Generally, for classroom use, portfolio assessment means students work on a set of papers during the semester and turn in revised papers representing their best work in a portfolio at the end of the term.

Lecturers reported that they used portfolios in all the following composition courses:

EN 100 EN 110/110A EN 225 EN 301 EN 302 EN 304 EN 305 EN 306

EN 403 -- and in--EN 214 (Intro to Fiction), EN 215 (Intro to Poetry), GKCWP

(Greater Kansas City Writing Project)

Who determines what papers go into the portfolio? When you do grade the portfolio at the end of the semester, do you give each paper a grade, or do you give one grade for the portfolio?

Mickey Dyer: Students decide which of the personal papers to include, usually 2 out 3; I decide the two major, usually research papers to include. Final drafts only. I give one grade for the entire portfolio. 40% of grade= Double Entry Journals, etc. 60% of grade= portfolio papers

Maureen Maginn: I determine which papers go into the portfolio--all assigned papers do. I give each paper a grade.

Ted Otteson: Students decide.

Sheila Honig: Generally I grade a mid-semester and end-of-semester portfolio. Usually, I determine the papers that go in it, but that varies according to which class I'm teaching. I give each paper a grade.

Danny Reardon: I use a modified system in which I give a grade for the 3rd draft of every paper.

Brooke Fredericksen: The student is allowed to choose from the papers they have written during the semester, as well as from other writings (journal entries, e.g.). Portfolio comprises 65% of students' grade and is graded at the end of the semester. One grade for portfolio.

Lenore Carroll: Students determine--but they are given class time to confer with group members. And I may make suggestions. I give one grade for the portfolio as a whole.

Joe Stornello: I ask that the portfolio contain all drafts and responses related to each essay submitted in the portfolio. Grades are based on individual essays.

Margaret McCormick: Students select what goes into the portfolio and I assign sets of selections a grade.

Phil Black Students decide. I give each paper a grade and a grade for the portfolio.

Pat Huyett: I decide, but in an ideal situation, I think students should. If I decide it's less work for me in the long run. I give one grade for the portfolio which counts as 70% of their final grade.

Dan Mahala: All of the student's work goes into the portfolio so that I can view the student's work as a whole, in context. But the quality of only the student's self-selected "best" pieces form the basis of the portfolio grade. The portfolio grade reflects the quality of these selected pieces, as a whole.

How do you assess students throughout the term? Do you give a mid-term grade? Do you tell students if they're doing below average work so they can drop?

M.D. I respond to each draft during the semester via the enclosed form, "Student/Teacher Draft Response" that begins our dialogue about their writing that continues for each draft. I will give a grade anytime a student asks (and usually they don't). I do not give mid-term grades but students usually have a journal grade to go by. I will tell students if I am worried about their attendance or progress report form which I write on continually as students turn in work to me.
MM I respond to drafts in letters to the students and in conferences.
TO: I give a preliminary grade for each paper (which may be revised later for the portfolio).
SH: I do give a grade on the mid-semester portfolio. I let students know if they should drop. I have mid-semester conferences and inform them of my perception of their progress.
DR: Grades on drafts and quizzes let them know.
LC: I grade each assignment so they have my feedback as well as their group's, or as they go along. Usually they drop without my telling them. If they're not passing at midterm, I tell them.
BF: Students are continuously writing drafts and papers and are graded on their papers. They also have conferences with me and they are generally aware of the average of their grades. I do not give a mid-term grade.
JS: Continuous assessment/feedback...Use of portfolios alters this method slightly...grades are suspended until the end, and written responses are dominant means of informing students of their progress.
MMC: I let students know if they should drop. Portfolio work comes from non-graded writing done during the semester. I have them write often.
PB: I assess students by looking at their revisions and by class contributions.
PH: I tell students they can assume they're making at least a "C" unless I tell them otherwise. I record a "secret" or unofficial grade for the first paper just in case someone insists on knowing what the grade would be. I don't give a mid-term grade.
DM: I give formative responses to students as they write throughout the term. No grade is given to their work, but my language of response, and the questions I pose are often evaluative. So the student has a pretty good idea of my opinion of their progress. I tell them that if they're doing less than C work I'll let them know. I also tell them that, if not getting grades until the end makes them nervous, I'll appraise any piece (as if it were a representative sample of their final portfolio),but almost no one takes me up on it.

Assuming you reserve grades for midterm or semester's end, what sorts of things do you look for when you go over student papers? Generally, how do you mark papers? Do you combine student conferences with written comments? How often do you schedule conferences during the semester?

MD: I hand out Grading Standards at the beginning of the term which we discuss and use to evaluate sample papers. We also set up evaluation criteria for each paper and talk about what might need to be stressed for each paper. I mark "problem" areas, such as the punctuation in one paragraph if that seems to be a problem, but I do not mark up an entire paper. I concentrate first of all on finding a central idea, then organization and so on. Usually the last two weeks we concentrate on editing techniques. I also respond to what they want me to as indicated on the Revised Draft Response sheet. 99% of the time student writers know their strengths and weaknesses so I just help them develop their strengths. I hold one "official" conference, which means I let out class for one or two times during the semester. Unofficial conferences are any time. I also use mini-lessons before group work to prepare them to look for certain qualities in the paper they are responding to. If a student want to know a grade for a paper, the student must bring me a draft to be graded and answer for me first what grade she thinks it is. If you practice grading in class, students usually agree with you and they just end up giving it first.

MM: I look at "global" stuff first--purpose, audience, thesis, development/illustration/support/organization, and the logic of all of it. I only "mark" them when I need to point out textual problems that would take too long to describe in a letter--but I either refer to the marks in the letter or discuss them with the student in conference. I put a lot of emphasis on their developing critical and evaluative skills--through group response and self-evaluation and grading sample essays. I see an evolving draft several times. I schedule two conferences and let students schedule additional conferences whenever they want.

TO: I look for the same four elements as in our grading standards--plus responsiveness to the assignment. I make over-all positive and negative comments. Mark a few representative "language use" areas. At least one conference per semester.

SH: I use the published grading standards when I evaluate student papers. I generally use a separate sheet(s) of paper for my comments on their portfolios. At the mid-semester conference I combine written comments with student conferences. I schedule at least one formal conference per student per semester.

DR: I schedule 3-4 conferences during the semester:
Draft one: written and peer group responses
Draft two: conference-oral response
Draft three--grade and written response
Then students may re-submit papers until the end of the semester.

LC: We go over criteria for each assignment in class. I read or share sample papers when possible. They get a handout of criteria. I answer questions about assignments. I write a note with a grade for each major assignment.

BF: I do <u>not</u> reserve grades; I grade each paper. My main foci are: thesis/focus; general structure & order; support and examples; last of all, sentence structure/grammar & punctuation & citation format. I give extensive written comments on each paper plus I arrange student conferences after drafts are turned in. I try to schedule at least three

conferences per semester.

JS: I look for clarity of thought and expression, etc. I work with a separate response sheet for the student's paper. My classroom is a highly interactive environment...conferences follow all returned essays. I have four series of conferences.

MMC: I have one conference a semester.

PB: I look for a pattern of thought--a process reflected in their revision. I comment/ask some as I go, but mostly I give comments at the end. My comments are like this: "I don't understand this section at all." When I have conferences usually 30-60 minutes) we talk about their progress, life, etc. I schedule conferences twice/semester, but I do lots of workshops in class so they have time to approach me.

PH: I look to see if they're making a point and how well they're making it. I ask a lot of questions because I feel that usually they need to develop their ideas more. I don't mark up an entire paper--I make marginal notes and write a note summarizing my reactions at the end of the paper. I let them know if I see a particular problem, such as diction and how they might fix that. I schedule at least two conferences per student each semester and I encourage students to come in and talk with me whenever they feel they need to.

DM: Before the end of the term I'll usually hold a conference and point (along with the grade they think they deserve). If there's a big disagreement (which is somewhat unusual) we'll hash it out. Other times we agree, or I'll say their estimate is a little too high or too low.

Sometimes, I'll hold conferences weekly, or biweekly, as a substitute for most written response. I think this works best for the students, though I'm not always up for it.

When I do grade the portfolios at the end I'm usually not surprised. (There are some exceptions!) I read the clean copy of the student's best work (say, twenty pages) straight through, consider the distance they've traversed to culminate their inquiry in this text, and give a portfolio grade. (Other factors too, like participation and attendance, count in the final grade). After I've given a portfolio grade and a final grade, I'll write a response justifying them, if the student requested one. It's curious to me that I almost never change the grade as a result of having to articulate reasons for it.

What differences in your teaching or student responses have you noticed in using portfolios as opposed to grading/returning/averaging student papers?

MD I think my students learn that writing is a process, they learn what strengths they have as opposed to all of the weaknesses they have heard before, they learn to read writing more effectively because we practice it all semester. My teaching has changed because they allow me to be their user-friendly source of writing information instead of The Evaluator. Perhaps I just give them more hope about their writing because I don't evaluate it right away. I also involve them in the process more because they are responsible for their writing as well as a self-evaluation of their portfolio. In English 305, for future teachers, I do "mock" grade the first paper show them how I evaluate by the grading standards. This allows us to talk about he grading system and how students feel by getting nor getting one. They are allowed to keep the grade or rewrite all semester.

MM: Students are less dependent on my skills and develop their own more. Essays improve in major ways--not just the teacher-directed ways(often first-aid type) in which they "changed" before I used portfolios.
TC: Students revise more and have less grade anxiety.
SH: Students who take advantage of the extra time and my comments and those of their peers generally write better papers. Doing some kind of portfolio system puts the emphasis on revision more than traditional evaluations do. I think some kind of portfolio system helps me to slow down a little as an instructor. It helps me diffuse an "assembly line" attitude for me and my students.
DR: Improved revision skills--students work harder, have less resentment over grades.
LC: I forget what it was like before. Each assignment had too much importance and there was no 2nd chance to revise. I have a second chance to instruct over things I forgot or they didn't catch. I enjoy reading the revised portfolio versions.
BF: I like the concept of using a portfolio, especially in English 225, because it gives the students more control over their grade, their work, their learning. I always emphasize the fact that the students have to make the choices of what to include and have to take responsibility for revisions. Students like the idea that they can have input on their grades in more than just doing individual papers; in other words, they can materially affect their grades by putting in some real work on a portfolio. As far as I can tell, students seem to like this method.
JS: Students requesting the opportunity of doing a portfolio will write at least at least a 3rd version of each essay.
MMC: Dunno...Have never used them <u>instead</u>, have always used them <u>with</u>.
PB: I feel more comfortable addressing what they need--critical thinking through revision. I believe the key to portfolios is for the teacher to be really good at teaching revision/getting students to honestly revise--that handles a lot of the "what's my grade?" syndrome.
PH: Portfolios make me feel as if I'm more of a coach and less of a judge. Students do have some anxiety about grades, but they also feel as though they have more chances to "get it right." I don't mark papers in order to justify grades any more--and I feel I have more invested in their work, too. I try to look at their papers as a concerned reader. The exciting thing about portfolios is I can actually see the progress they're making--students can set realistic goals for themselves and I can help them with that process.
DM: I like the portfolio system because it challenges my students to recognize the complexity of reader responses, and not reduce them to a single number. How many times does a student give me a paper that I think is better than previous work in some ways but worse in others? I think most of the students feel the delay in grades gives them more space to take some risks, to play with language and ideas, to tolerate the uncertainty generated by feedback. Most of the students want me to guide them, and I do. But, in the past, as soon as I would tie my "guidance" to a number on a single scale, I would find them phasing out, or reacting as if I'd just given marching orders: "I could find a more provocative angle Mr. M if only you'll tell me what you want." I don't want to play this role, and when students cast me in it, I resist.

Have you have had some problems with portfolios? Have you found them less useful in some classes than others? Please explain.

MD: Because I evaluate at the end, I have felt uncomfortable trying to remember everything about certain drafts. This made grading more difficult and I think too subjective. I devised the progress report to help me remember and help me be more objective. Did a student indeed revise, use more sources, overcome a difficulty, improve a weakness?
I have felt uncomfortable doing a portfolio in which I chose every paper--that is not a portfolio. I like students being able to choose which of personal response papers to include; I like selecting the research papers because I still like to be in charge. (Haha)
MM: Some students are so conditioned to be directed that they feel clueless and powerless with the new responsibility. But this can become one of the subjects of cultural studies courses.
TO: I've tried it without grading each paper when it is first done--grading only at the semester's end caused too much anxiety.
SH: Students who have never experienced a portfolio system of evaluating sometimes lack the discipline required to take advantage of what it offers or are a little overwhelmed by having to work on more than one paper at a time.
DR: Well, with grades--students are, I've found, obsessive about them. They really feel they need them. I don't like that, but I also feel one grade at the end of the semester is not fair to them.
LC: If I inflate grades at the start of the semester to give positive reinforcement, students have no reason to revise to improve the portfolio grade. I try to hand the portfolio grades out before the end of the semester so they know what they got. Then they do one more small assignment. I don't want portfolios and final exams all at once; I feel frantic.

It takes a certain maturity or fear or ambition for the concept to work. Some students blow it off and hand in un-revised papers. (I blow off their grades). The teacher has to be very clear on the mechanical details of how it works or the students are confused. I'm still fine tuning instructions. Since I've read the papers once, I require my comments and the original draft to come in with the revised portfolio version so I can see how much revision the student did and how effective their efforts were.
BF: The one problem I had was that students seem to mistake 65% (the percentage the portfolio comprises of their grade) for 100%, and I have had several come to me demanding a higher grade because they thought their portfolio was perfect.
MMC: I don't use them in technical writing.
JS: I do not enjoy using portfolios. They are a useful means of relieving student performance anxiety, however, and I think some students need the opportunity to work on their writing for a longer period of time and they need the benefit of several responses.
PB: I'm really sold on them. In fact, I think anything less than full blown portfolios (for me) takes away from the point as it buys into the grade intensive method.
PH: It's harder in courses such as Intro to Poetry because there are so many students, so I use a modified system there. I'd like it better if I my classes were limited to 20 students or so--then I'd probably have them write more essays and choose the best ones. I do keep track of who's given me revisions throughout the semester, otherwise I'd forget.
DM: Sometimes students criticize my course because I don't grade as a regular

feature of the class. Maybe I need to move up the grade conference to earlier in the term (say, five or six weeks before the end) so that we know if we're in the same ballpark or not earlier in the term. But I feel ambivalent about this. Some of the criticisms might be attributable to the obsession with "the bottom line," a desire for simple answers, or other tendencies in our culture that we should resist. On the other hand, students deserve fair, above-board dealing about grades.

Briefly describe what you see as the advantages and disadvantages of portfolio assessment.

MD: Advantages: greater student involvement in writing and critical thinking and reading greater focus on writing as a process, not lip-service, we really do it--we don't ignore evaluation, but it does not control us; I like to think my students write more for themselves or their peers and not for me (until the last two weeks when panic sets in). Disadvantages: 3/4 of the way through the semester, you believe you have failed each of your students (teacher panic) and it is too late to change the system. The progress report and self-evaluation help eliminate the burden of grading everything at the end, but there are still several drafts to read through.

MM: I think it's possible to distort and misuse anything. If the teacher loses her vision and sense of purpose regarding the use of portfolios in the context of her whole pedagogy, it's not just meaningless--it's confusing and disempowering for all involved. But when she knows--or is actively engaged in discovering--what portfolio assessment can be to her and to her students, it can be a powerful cultural studies tool, something that can enable students to gain the very skills we have.

DR: Advantages: 1) allows student to write at their own pace, in their own way.
2) Subverts the evaluation "ranking their work" syndrome.
3) Emphasizes revision as the key element of composing.
Disadvantages: 1) Paperloadl
2) We can often send students "the wrong signals" if we don't let them know how they're doing in class overall.

LC: The students have the chance to apply what they've learned over the semester. They may choose not to; they may have learned nothing.

BF: I think portfolios give students the chance to take responsibility for their own work by giving them the opportunity to choose and evaluate and revise and compile a presentation of their "best" writing. I would highly recommend portfolio use to any teacher of writing.

JS: I offer my students an option of using a portfolio procedure, or choosing to submit their essays at scheduled deadlines for a grade. This term 2/3 of the class did not want to do a portfolio.

MMC: Advantages--Students write more during the semester. Students get credit for certain ungraded writing. Students get to exercise judgment. Teacher can see development of students' judgment over the course of the semester. Most successful when this process includes peer review.

PB: The main thing: students learn to quit worrying about grades and writing for grades. You, as a teacher have a whole semester to convince these people that writing can be done for other reasons. Of course, if you are successful, you may end up with a lot of

high grades. If you don't do a good job, you end up with potential law suits.

PH: There are always going to be students who think their work is better than you do. Some students can't handle the responsibility. You can't force someone to revise if they don't want to. But ultimately out there in the real world, they're going to have to be their own editors, so that's a choice they make. The main advantage I see is that I truly feel as if I'm teaching writing. It's gratifying to see students' work improve. Before, I felt as though I had an almost adversarial relationship with students--now I feel more as if we're in this together. I haven't had the end-of-semester headaches some people do because usually by the time I see the portfolio I'm familiar with what's in it. I really don't spend that much time reading at the end--not like I thought I would when I first started using portfolios. If you think grade inflation is a disadvantage, then that's a problem. But I don't see it as a problem, and if I grade a little higher than I did before, then I'd like to think I'm a more effective teacher and that my students really are revising more and therefore doing better.

DM: The main danger I see in the portfolio system is that teachers can, if they are uncomfortable with their authority as teachers, evade their responsibility to guide and evaluate the students' work throughout the term. Especially beginning teachers, I think, can avoid dealing with how they feel about their role as evaluator, so that when they are finally compelled to address this issue late in the semester, their actual responses are not at all what they or their students had thought. By then, though, problems are too late to remedy.

Dyer/Eng

Student/Teacher Draft Response

Respond to the questions below about your draft and staple this form on top of your typed draft. Anytime you turn in a draft to me for response, answer these questions and attach the answers to your draft.

Student Response:

1. What do you think is most effective about this draft and why? (Could be language use, idea, structure, support, introduction, etc.)

2. What do you think is least effective and why?

3. What do you want me to look for and/or respond to in this draft?

Teacher Response:

Eng 305 Student Progress Report

Name:_____

First Portfolio Project: Memory Piece Comments

# of drafts: on time: group participation:

Second Portfolio Project: Companion Piece Comments:

# of drafts: on time: group participation:

Third Portfolio Project: Documentation T&P Paper Comments

# of drafts: MLA usage: # of sources: (5) groups:

Fourth Portfolio Project: Letter Writing Project/I-Search Comments:

Completion of letters:

# of drafts: MLA usage: # of sources: groups:

Fifth Portfolio Project: Personal response Comments:

Completed:

Presentation Comments:

Time: Evaluation:

Journal comments: Evaluation: